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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 2592
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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4359
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 8525
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3560
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RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [PBTS](#) [MOPS](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [PK](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: INDIA MULLING TALKS WITH KASHMIRI SEPARATISTS

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Classified By: PolCouns Ted Osius, Reason 1.5 (B,D)

¶1. (S) Summary. Deputy PolCouns met with one of India's chief negotiators with the Kashmiri separatists, Union Cabinet Minister for Water Resources Professor Saifuddin Soz, himself a Kashmiri, to discuss Mirwaiz Omar Farooq's visit to Pakistan, New Delhi's response to the Mirwaiz's statements denouncing violence, and our continued concerns about the moderate separatists' safety from terrorists in the Srinagar Valley. Soz was optimistic about the state of discussions with Pakistan on the Kashmir dispute and even more enthusiastic about the prospect of talks between New Delhi and Srinagar. He wished that the moderate separatists would contest the 2008 elections. He praised the longstanding "subtle" US strategy of not intervening publicly in the dispute and said this must continue until the conflict was resolved, but he commented that there was significant hope that the dispute could before too long witness a "break through." End Summary.

Hawks Softening

¶2. (S) Deputy PolCouns met on January 24th with Professor Saifuddin Soz, the Union Cabinet Minister for Water Resources, who serves as the Congress Party's key interlocutor with Kashmiri separatists. Soz discussed at length the prospect of renewed talks between New Delhi and the All Parties Hurriyat Council, led by Mirwaiz Omar Farooq. Throughout the meeting, he spoke highly of the Mirwaiz and praised his statement calling for an end to violence in the

region. He said this was a very bold statement, and he believed that New Delhi would respond positively. He said he would urge the Prime Minister to meet with the Mirwaiz and the moderate APHC when the delegation returns from Pakistan on January 26th, and he believed the Prime Minister would meet with the group. He said that although there had been some hawks who were against the Prime Minister meeting with the Mirwaiz before his trip to Pakistan, they had softened their stance when the Mirwaiz made his statements denouncing violence. He clarified that there was an understanding in India that it was the wrong time to display hawkishness. "We have moved into a decisive phase with Pakistan," he said.

13. (S) When DPolCouns asked about the Army's concerns about terrorism and Siachen, Soz commented that the Army's position is not that definitive. "We are a democracy," he said, and there is an understanding in Delhi that "this is too much for an Indian Army General to say." It is not for the Army to decide what the Prime Minister does, he said.

Separatists Should Stand for Elections

14. (S) Soz said further that the hawks "realize Kashmiris are also important." There must be someone to deliver on the ground in Srinagar once a settlement happens, he explained. In that sense, he said, the mainstream political parties can't deliver. The separatists must come forward into the political realm in order to make the agreement work. He said he would ensure that the Prime Minister meets with the APHC when they return. India should make sure the Mirwaiz has something in hand for the Kashmiri people, he said, because otherwise the extremists will say the APHC gained nothing from their efforts. He commented that he hoped the APHC would be strengthened in some way on the ground. Sox said

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the Mirwaiz should be "armed with some success" by New Delhi, some kind of gesture, that would bring further prosperity to Kashmir and help bring people into the mainstream of development.

Get the Hurriyat Into Politics

15. (S) When DPolCouns asked if the People's Democratic Party/Congress Party coalition in Jammu was strong, Soz said there is difficulty, but this is the coalition that must stand. He explained that he is dead against forging a new alliance between the Congress Party and Farooq Abdullah's United Conference party. "You cannot forge unity," he said, "and go back to a government that does not have credibility."

Further he predicted the Mirwaiz and the moderate separatists would also stand for elections in 2008 and the mainstream political parties will have to step back a bit. This time, he commented, the Hurriyat should prove that they are the voice of the people. They must, he promised, "have a fair chance through a fair election." "I hope," he remarked quietly, "that I will play some role in this."

Worried For Mirwaiz's Security

16. (S) Soz said he too was concerned about the APHC delegation's safety because Abdul Gani Lone was assassinated after going to Pakistan in 2002. He believed that now, however, the Hizbul Mujahideen was not as strong as they used to be. Hardliners like Sayeed Ali Shah Geelani would try to raise problems, but they are still weak. He said he had information that even Hizbul Mujahideen leader Sayeed Salahuddin had been in touch recently with Indian intelligence organizations. Terrorism in Kashmir is waning, he explained; there may always be guns, but the violence would subside. When Senior Pol FSN asked if Geelani was willing to change his position, Soz said he would let us know in 10 to 15 days because someone had asked him to approach

Geelani privately, and he was awaiting a response. If Geelani says dialogue is pointless, Soz remarked, then why should we talk to him? But if he softens, then we will talk to him, Soz said. Geelani is very courteous, Soz commented, but even Musharraf keeps telling us privately that he is an extremist.

Bring Them All on Board

17. (S) He warned that it was important to unite the rest of the separatists. Shabir Shah and Yasin Malik needed to be brought in to the discussions. The best hope would be for Yasin Malik to join the Mirwaiz, but Geelani was different. If Yasin is going to make a statement about the Mirwaiz's comments against violence, he should make it now, he said. History gives you one chance, he said, but if you lose it, you lose it. If Geelani also falls in line, this would be positive, he said, but it was more important that Yasin join the discussion, and stop fence-sitting.

Resolving Kashmir

18. (S) Soz commented overall that the mood had changed on the Kashmir issue in New Delhi. He predicted that there would be a settlement of the dispute. The US, he said, should take notice of the sense of achievement that was being made on the

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Kashmir dispute. Perhaps the US has not been able to resolve the Israel/Palestinian conflict, but in Kashmir there is something to show for US efforts. Credit also should go to Musharraf, he noted, that he retained good relations with India and the United States. Even if he became impatient, he said, Musharraf responded with words of friendship and remained in touch with the Indian Prime Minister. For the first time, India has shown a generally positive response to Musharraf's proposals. (Comment: Soz appears to be referring to Prime Minister Singh's positive response to President Musharraf's four point proposals on Kashmir, which the PM outlined in a campaign speech in Amritsar, Punjab. Press reports say Sonia Gandhi agreed to bless this positive response during a Congress Party meeting in December 2006. End Comment.) Soz added that he believed Prime Minister Singh would meet again with Musharraf.

Keeping a Subtle US Role

19. (S) On the US role, Soz said "you have been doing the right thing in this regard." The US was constantly in quiet touch with Pakistan on these issues, and it has had a good effect, he said. "You didn't do anything to show your hand and everything has been done in a subtle way," he said. You analyzed and understood it would be wrong to intervene publicly, he explained. This must be sustained, he warned, until a breakthrough is around the corner. He commented that it will be good for India and Pakistan to settle the Kashmir dispute because this peace will be good for the development of the whole nation. Now, he said, is the opportune time.

Comment: Over Zealous Optimism?

110. (S) We were surprised by Soz's optimism about the APHC trip to Pakistan. There are many more hurdles that need to be overcome before there will be a breakthrough on the Kashmir dispute. His optimism, however, may be due more to positive statements he is hearing from New Delhi about their willingness to work with the APHC, and perhaps a softening of the hardline blockade on the talks, than it is to actual behind-the-scenes movement between India and Pakistan, to which he is not likely fully privy. Nonetheless, he took on board our concerns for the safety of the APHC delegation and agreed readily that Delhi could help the Mirwaiz by giving him a tangible deliverable to take back to his Kashmiri

constituents. Much depends on the coming round of elections in October 2008 in Srinagar. If the Mirwaiz and his group try to unite their fellow separatists around a single platform, they must have the space necessary to enter the political realm without being silenced by terrorists. All of this optimism and our hopes for a resolution of the Kashmir dispute could come to a crashing halt if, like Abdul Gani Lone in 2002, one of these separatists is assassinated while trying to enter the democratic process.

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